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ABSTRACT

This manual describes the basis for a working relationship between institutions of higher education, particularly a continuing education office, and citizen groups engaged in community action. The guide is based on discussions that took place during four meetings involving approximately 20 administrators of higher education and 10 citizen group leaders. The first section of the manual explores the potential for and benefits to be derived from cooperation between continuing education and citizen groups. Discussed in the second section are the following stages of citizen involvement and action: arousal, protest, organization and self-education, community education, and resolution. The third section describes the services needed most by citizen groups that higher education may be equipped to provide, proposes criteria for administrators of continuing education to apply in deciding whether the institution should get involved, and weighs the risks and benefits of such involvement. Examined in the final section are some important considerations about linkage with higher education, concerns about higher education, and techniques for developing strategies for approaching higher education (technical assistance, internal group maintenance, and education of the community). (MN)

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A DIALOGUE OF CONSEQUENCE
CITIZEN GROUPS & HIGHER EDUCATION

ED271573

A manual to guide citizen groups leaders & continuing education administrators in forging educational partnerships.

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A Dialogue of Consequence:
Citizen Groups and Higher Education

A manual to guide citizen group leaders and continuing education administrators in forging educational partnerships

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1986

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Part I Introduction

This manual describes the basis for a working relationship between institutions of higher education, particularly the Continuing Education office, and citizen groups engaged in community action. Citizen groups present a new and challenging opportunity for public servie on the part of higher education. They consist of persons who have organized to accomplish an objective in their community. They are highly visible and yet exist without official sanction or authorization. Since they start with a deficit of knowledge and sophistication they engage first, in self-education about the problem or issue which brought them into existence. Second, they provide educational programs for their neighbors and fellow citizens in order to help them become equally informed and concerned. Through the dialogue described in this manual administrators of continuing education and citizen group leaders can explore and negotiate the contribution of higher education to this two-fold educational effort.

The manual is based on discussions that took place during four meetings in the past year (1985-1986) involving approximately 20 administrators of higher education and 10 citizen group leaders. The purposes of the meetings were first, to help the administrators learn more about the goals, activities, and educational needs of citizen groups, second, to help citizen group leaders understand the resources and services available from higher education as well as the process for obtaining them, and third, to create a climate and expectation of cooperation between the two groups. From these discussions it became obvious that cooperation with citizen groups in

efforts to increase understanding of problems and choices facing local communities is a legitimate form of public service for higher education. But it is complicated by the differences in mission and resources among institutions of higer education. For example, a two-year technical college may define public service in terms of its programs and courses to upgrade the skills of workers in local businesses and industries. A small private 4-year college may define public service in terms of its week-end college for adults. A large public research oriented university may define public service in terms of its many contracts with government, business and industry to develop solutions to technical problems. Therefore, it can be assumed that institutions of higher education differ widely in their ability to and their interest in pursuing the dialogue and the cooperation proposed in this manual. However, despite these differences, higher education shares in common the quest for truth and the application of knowledge to the important problems and questions facing humankind.

The Continuing Education Office is often the place where the general public encounters this tradition. The programs and services administered through Continuing Education are the most visible expression of a college's commitment to applying knowledge to problems. Moreover, it is the professional staff in continuing education who most often negotiate their institution's involvement with the community and its educational needs. Professionals in continuing education often define their role as helping the institution to meet the needs of a community that are not met by formal degree and certification programs. Therefore a small group of these professionals were invited to come together with citizen group leaders to explore the incentives and barriers inherent in cooperative efforts to provide education for communities on the problems and choices they confront.

Citizen groups form because people in a community have identified a problem that affects them deeply. They seek to understand it and to influence its resolution in a manner favorable to themselves. For the most part, they have not been approaching higher education for help. Perhaps this is because they are unaware of the knowledge base and expertise available from higher education. Perhaps they are not certain that it is appropriate to ask for assistance. Perhaps they are unconvinced that higher education will contribute to their efforts to understand and have influence over forces impacting their lives. Whatever the reason, this manual attempts to provide insight on the terms of cooperation between citizen group leaders and continuing education administrators so that each side may realize its goals. Recommendations regarding the process and terms of cooperation are provided in Parts III and IV of the manual. To provide context for these recommendations a brief overview of the citizen group experience is provided next.

Part II The Citizen Group Experience

It is a truism that an informed and active citizenry is the lifeblood of a democracy. Langton[1] says this activity is in reality a dual movement. There is citizen involvement which is government initiated or "top-down." The intent is both to improve and to gain support for administrative decisions and government programs by including citizens on decision-making boards and committees. Much of this involvement is legislatively mandated. In fact, almost all new major legislative programs at the state and federal levels contain citizen participation requirements.

The second dimension of citizen participation is citizen action. It is a "bottom-up" effort initiated by citizens. Learning and action are the means employed by grassroots citizen action groups to monitor and influence governmental officials, regulatory agencies, business, industry, and voters. Unlike the citizen involvement movement which has been legitimized and institutionalized by law, citizen action lacks official status, permanency, and enduring affiliation with anything. On the contrary, citizen action groups are at best looked upon with indifference or disdain. At times the treatment from government officials and corporate spokesmen has been worse, ranging from ridicule to threats of economic retaliation and law suits. Lacking easy access to information and paid staff persons to facilitate their objectives, citizen action group members seek out resources and support from wherever possible.

Despite obstacles, the impact of citizen action is evident in a variety of substantial reforms in government in recent years. Sunshine laws,

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[1]Langton, S. (1978) Citizen Participation in America. Lexington, MA: D. C. Heath and Company.

financial disclosure laws, freedom of information legislation, consumer rights legislation, and lobbyists registration requirements are examples of sustained efforts on the part of citizen groups to study and then influence government decision-making.

Citizen action has led to neighborhood revitalization, suspension of utility rate increases, abandonment of highway construction projects, improvement in health care facilities, revision of school district annexation laws, and product safety improvements. In several Ohio communities, for example, citizen coalitions for study and action have arisen out of concern over many issues affecting their lives, including the hazards of toxic waste disposal, proposals to build or widen highways,and plans to raze historical buildings.

The relevance of this ferment of activity for continuing education professionals is that citizen groups contain aggressive and dynamic adult learners addressing the most important problems confronting us as a society. Group members engage in rigorous study. They read research reports and public documents, interview technical experts and government officials, gather data, analyze their findings, and debate the implications of what they learn. Furthermore, they go on to assume the role of educators in order to empower neighbors and fellow citizens with the same insights.

Research[2] on citizen group activity indicates that it occurs in sequential stages. The stages, however, overlap and at times almost become

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[2]Boggs, D. L. (1984). Citizen Groups: Their Significance for Adult Education. In Robert Hoghielm (Ed.) Rekindling Commitment in Adult Education: Conference Report 10-14 June 1984 at Rutgers State University, NJ. Stockholm: Stockholm Institute of Education, Department of Educational Research.

indistinguishable. A compressed time frame and indeed a frantic pace often characterizes the activities in each stage. Following is a brief description of the activities that occurred within each of five stages. This information is summarized in Table 1.

1. Arousal. This stage is characterized by a sudden awareness on the part of a few observant individuals in the community that some decision is imminent which will threaten the health, livelihood, property, or some other cherished value of the community. This awareness is followed by a call to meet and pool information. There is an attempt to find out the facts. Sometimes this fact-finding is done surreptitiously. The information gathered is usually incomplete because it is done rapidly and not all parties to the situation will necessarily contribute what they know. Some information is probably withheld or inexcessible. However, the dominant mood is one of fear, urgency, and eventually anger. The result is expressed in statements such as, "How dare they think they can do that to us and expect us to take it laying down." The perpetrators of the problem may inadvertently contribute to citizen resolve by condescending, bumbling, heavy-handed behavior.

2. Protest. This takes the form of phone calls and personal visits to local public officials and to state agencies to express opposition, disapproval, and/or demand for protection. The response is generally either one of "I don't

know," "The facts aren't in yet," or "There has been no official position taken or response which I can share with you." The result, then, of protest is most likely to be a combination of frustration and anxiety over the fact that this is not going to be something easily turned around, increased anger and passion that their worst fears are indeed being realized, and emergence of local unofficial leadership within the community. Their sophisticated opponents host public meetings to present their proposal and respond to questions. They hope to defuse opposition and win public support or at least indifference to their plans.

3. Organization and self-education. This is the longest and most arduous stage of activity. It is apparent that organization is critical. Officers or trustees are elected. A constitution and by-laws are drafted and approved. Committees such as science and education, speakers bureau, letter writing, fund raising, petitions, and government are formed. An attorney may be contacted to help the group incorporate, set up bank accounts, and plan legal strategy.

Resources - human, printed, and monetary - are critical to the committees. Specialists who have knowledge of some aspects of the problem are recruited or come forward to offer their services and perhaps those of their agencies. People in other citizen groups are identified and called for help. Publications on citizen responses to similar problems in other

communities are obtained. Relevant scientific literature is found and studied. Research is conducted on the approval process which their opponents are required by law to follow, the relevant government agencies, and the appeal process. Funds are raised through membership dues, donations, bake sales, rummage sales and the like.

4. Community education. Close upon the heels of self education is the campaign to educate and win over the community. The group begins with a tremenduous handicap. Their opponents have thought extensively about the change they are proposing. They have spent money and time to present a slick proposal to the community, complete with charts, graphs, maps and a rationale stressing jobs, progress, and development that will accompany its implementation. Citizens who have concerns are put in the position of being alarmists, radicals, ingrates, and troublemakers. They are made to feel ridiculous, isolated, and stupid.

Fortified by its self-study process, citizen groups hold public meetings to educate their fellow citizens. They go from town to town in the surrounding community and from group to group, getting on the agenda for every meeting they can find to present the case for examining the issue more carefully. They take their educational program complete with slides, handouts, and charts to schools, service clubs, township trustees, county commissioners, unions, women's

clubs, and so on. They set up information booths at fairs, in malls, and on the street to pass out literature and present their case to the community. They stage events such as balloon launchings, rallies, marches, and bonfires to dramatize the issue and raise public awareness. Concurrent with these activities groups wage letter writing campaigns, deluging public officials, government agencies, and local newspapers expressing their position.

Throughout the processes of self and community education accuracy of facts and conclusions is important for the group's credibility. Documentation of every argument is essential.

Skull sessions are held to rehearse and critique the style and substance of each others presentations. Some play the devils advocate by anticipating arguments and objections. Concurrent with its program of community education, the citizen group carefully monitors the actions of public agencies having jurisdiction over the issue in dispute. In the previous stage learning was predominantly scientific and technical. In this stage there is an emphasis on learning about the system, about how decisions are made, and when and where pressure can be applied. There may be considerable debate over the proper balance of education, demonstration, and confrontation.

It is in this stage that the group is most vulnerable to discouragement and declining participation. Uncounted hours have been devoted to the cause. The rest of life is overshadowed. Personal and professional sacrifices are made. Friendships and even marriages buckle under the strain. Learning how to handle stress and conflict is essential.

5. Resolution. In this stage either the issue is resolved or a stalemate prevails. In either case many participants end their involvement. A small core of people, however, broaden their activities to work on other community issues. Some stand for election to city council, school board, township trustees; some become active in national organizations concerned with the problem their group has addressed. In any case they are forever changed. They are less trusting of public officials. They are more appreciative of their ability to impact the decision making process. They are skilled now in looking beneath the surface of things. They have grown in confidence, having accomplished things they never imagined possible. They have given speeches, written letters, gathered petitions, talked to people door-to-door, and raised money. They are in a position to put those skills to use on other community needs and problems.

Some observerations about higher education's contribution to these five categories of activity seem to be in order. First, competence to perform all the various activities associated with each stage does not depend on

assistance from higher education. Second, learning and teaching are associated more with some stages than with others. Third, citizen groups will vary considerably in their effectiveness in educating the community. Fourth, there are specific types of assistance that higher education can provide which would be helpful.

A premise continuously tested in the meetings of the citizen leaders and continuing education administrators was that higher education cannot afford to be left out of citizens' efforts to understand major developments in their lives; that higher education can contribute to citizen inquiry into the values associated with the choices confronting communities and the society-at-large. A second premise, again continuously tested, was that in most institutions of higher education the Continuing Education office is the appropriate place to begin the dialogue over the institution's contribution.

Table 1

Stages, Activities and Required Competencies
in the Citizen Group Experience

	Activities	Competencies
Stage 1 AROUSAL	Awareness of threat to health and property	Fact-finding
Stage 2 PROTEST	Phone calls	Communicate with public officials and representatives of the opposition
	Personal visits	Organize and/or prepare for initial meeting between the public and persons knowledgeable about the problem
		Control anger; channel emotions
Stage 3 ORGANIZATION AND SELF-EDUCATION	Form committees	Leadership and organizational skills
	Obtain resources	Learn how relevant government agencies work
	Identify and link up with persons and agencies who can help develop strategy	Establish agendas for committees
	Recruit members	Read, analyze, and discuss pertinent literature

	Activities	Competencies
	Raise money	Establish communication channels to members and the community
		Budgeting
Stage 4 COMMUNITY EDUCATION	Conduct meetings to inform community groups	Program planning, evaluation, and revision of programs
	Write letters	Organize and manage volunteers
	Raise money	Prepare audio-visual materials
	Develop educational materials; handouts flyers, position papers	Striking balance between education and action
	Speak to community groups	Public speaking
	Reading, keeping informed on new developments, data, and arguments	Handling stress and conflict
	Build base of support with public officials, unions, and community organizations	Develop long-range plan to sustain the effort
	Monitor actions of relevant public agencies	Budgeting
		Record keeping
		Develop letter writing skills
		Prepare and distribute newsletters, flyers

	Activities	Competencies
Stage 5 RESOLUTION	Withdrawal by some	Stamina; persistence to see the issue through
	Broadening interest in community problems	

Part III Assistance From Higher Education

The purposes of this section of the manual are first, to list and describe services needed most by citizen groups which higher education may be equipped to provide; second, to propose critieria administrators of continuing education can apply in deciding whether the institution should get involved; and third, to weigh the risks and benefits of involvement.

It needs to be recognized that there are real constraints on the services that the Continuing Education office can provide. First of all, continuing education staff do not determine their institution's priorities. This is the prerogative of governing boards and chief executive officers. Second, there is the immediate and practical constraint of never having enough staff or resources, and third, in most institutions, the requirement to recover costs. These constraints contribute to the inevitable tension that is associated with achieving the institution's self-interest by offering programs for more elite groups that pay well and at the same time contributing to the democratic goals of helping ordinary people understand and influence decisions and developments in their communities. In recent years economic pressures have led institutions to curtail programs addressing social problems and community issues in favor of the search for more affluent, if no less worthy markets. Promotion of ties to the corporate world and the design of low-risk, high-yield training activities have assumed center stage. The accuracy of this generalization varies from one locality and from one institution to another, but the general tendency is nevertheless discernible. This reality pervades negotiations between citizen group leaders and continuing education administrators and it influences the recommendations for cooperation that follow.

1. Needed Services Higher Education is Equipped to Provide

The research on citizen action groups reported above in Part II suggests that professionals in continuing education could best assist them with Technical Assistance, Internal Group Maintenance, and Education of the Community.

1.1 Technical assistance. Specifically, administrators of continuing education are knowledgeable about the programs and personnel in their institutions and have a network of contacts with resource persons and agencies in the community. They could aid citizen groups by:

(a) identifying faculty in relevant disciplines having expertise on the problem

(b) making initial contact with appropriate faculty and arranging for a meeting

(c) locating pertinent educational materials and programs developed at the institution

(d) advising citizen leaders on local, state, and national organizations having interest and competence regarding the problem

(e) helping to write proposals to submit to foundations for funding

1.2 Internal group maintenance. In their own right administrators of continuing education creatively apply principles from business, marketing, and education. These same skills are relevant to the stability, and viability of citizen groups. Specifically, citizen groups could benefit from the experience continuing education professionals have with:

(a) problem definition and analysis

(b) short range planning and long range goal setting

(c) organizing and coordinating the efforts of volunteers

(d) developing plans that give direction to and sustain the efforts of committees

(e) record keeping and budgeting

(f) handling the stress and conflict that are inherent in pressure-filled situations

(g) locating resources to aid the groups self-directed study activities

(h) providing space for meetings

1.3 Education of the Community. Within the Continuing Education office as well as the larger institution there are persons with the knowledge and expertise to assist citizen groups with the task of community education. The quality of citizen group sponsored education programs is inconsistent. These activities could be improved by some assistance with:

(a) planning and implementing educational programs

(b) locating speakers

(c) marketing these programs

(d) preparing audio-visual and print materials

(e) public speaking and letter writing

(f) newsletter preparation and distribution

(g) summarizing technical information in written form for public distribution

(h) understanding the workings of relevant government agencies

(i) communicating with officials and representatives of government, business, and industry

Note that these forms of assistance do not imply that educators have the answers to the problems confronting communities. Nor does assistance imply that they should advocate particular solutions. Rather, assistance is an expression of commitment to the search for truth and the value of widespread understanding and debate about the problems confronting society. Assistance is rooted in the belief that complex problems require intense and thorough study and that academic institutions can facilitate this process. These forms of assistance facilitate efforts of citizens to reflect and decide on the kind of society in which they choose to live. By means of this assistance institutions of higher education will not be set outside the mainstream of democracy nor uninvolved in the efforts of people to resolve

the problems they confront. Assistance to citizen groups in any of the forms described above is a valid form of intellectual leadership for professionals in continuing education to exercise.

2. Deciding Whether Assistance is Appropriate

The Continuing Education office is buffeted by competing expectations over whom it will serve and what it will accomplish. There are multiple alternatives to consider regarding priorities for the use of resources. It would be useful to have some criteria to apply when weighing whether assistance to citizen groups is an appropriate use of the resources of higher education. Citizen group activities involve five elements:

1. purposes for which the activities are undertaken,
2. the activities themselves which are chosen to achieve the purposes,
3. citizens who are engaged in the activities,
4. entities in government, business, or industry with whom the citizen group interacts, and
5. citizens-at-large who are the object of efforts to educate and persuade.

Each of these elements suggests criteria what might be used when deciding whether linkage with a citizen group would be appropriate.

Concerning purposes, it seems reasonable to ask whether the problem or issue addressed by the citizen group is related to larger local, state, and national problems. In other words, can the educational agenda be expanded and generalized beyond the specific problem at hand? If so, then institutions of higher education, and more specifically, Continuing Education offices are appropriate agencies to further the education of citizens on these problems. For example, opening a toxic waste facility anywhere is inextricably related to the national debate over toxic waste

disposal, to government funded clean-up programs, to local-versus-state control of zoning ordinances, to environmental impact studies, and so on. On the other hand, narrow partisan or religious debates, such as efforts to change the school calendar or eliminate daylight savings time offer less opportunity for expanding the educational agenda. Hence, the nature of a citizen group's problem and its context constitutes the first criterion.

Concerning activities, it seems reasonable to ask whether the citizen group gives first priority to education over other activities such as agitation and confrontation in order to achieve its goals. The overview of citizen group activity presented earlier suggests that the newsletters, seminars, testimony at public hearings, presentations to college students, preparing educational materials, and conducting public meetings are evidence of an extensive effort in self and community education. Granted, in goals and needs citizen group learners differ from others served in continuing education. Yet the nature and purpose of their activities are substantively educational.

Concerning the citizens themselves, it seems reasonable to ask whether the group leaders and a significant number of the members are reasonable and credible. Professionals in continuing education must rely on their knowledge of a community to make this judgment. The research on citizen groups cited above suggests that some elements in the community view them as radicals, alarmists, ingrates, and trouble makers. A listening ear and a little probing reveals them to be essentially conservative people, a cross-section of the community--small business owners, retirees, farmers, housewives, nurses, young couples with families. In any case, credibility of the leadership as people with whom one can negotiate, reason, and reach decisions is an essential criterion. Evidence of a group's credibility is

its ability to persuade the general community to contribute money in support of its cause. Successful fund-raising efforts also make it possible for the group to pay for services provided through continuing education.

Concerning the actions or decisions by entities in government, business, or industry with whom a citizen group interacts, it seems reasonable to ask is society well served by apparent silence from higher education concerning those actions or decisions? Or is it not appropriate for higher education to include the wider community in its internal discussions regarding the wisdom of actions and decisions taken by these entities? These discussions occur routinely among faculty and students. Why not test the validity of reasons and arguments by extending the debate to the audience most affected by the actions and decisions of government, business, and industry?

Concerning the citizens-at-large whose concern and support the citizen group seeks to influence, it seems reasonable to ask how widely and deeply the issue or problem cuts in their lives? If the actions or decisions being taken will affect significant numbers of persons for years to come this is justification for higher education to be involved. How many persons need to be affected and in what manner are all value judgments for which hard and fast rules cannot be written. The higher education community--faculty, staff, students, and administrators -does not exist in some vacuum. These persons are part of the citizens-at-large affected by these same actions and decisions.

3. Risks and Benefits of Involvement

Risks and benefits are not necessarily opposites. Each may well contain elements of the other. Nevertheless, the risks are serious and reasons for avoiding citizen groups abound. The risks can be classified as internal and

external. From an internal standpoint, first there are never enough staff or resources to develop and manage the regular on-going activities for which the Continuing Education office is responsible. Citizen groups represent one more, but far from typical, constituency. The services needed are anything but standard. Groups may lack ability to articulate their needs. It can be time consuming to clarify, negotiate, and indeed deliver the precise combination of services that would be appropriate. A very real consequence could be a reduction in development of income-generating programs that can be the difference between fiscal solvency and a shrinking margin for some institutions.

A second internal risk is the willingness and ability of academic departments and faculty to respond flexibly to the needs of a particular group for technical assistance. Education, including continuing education, that is packaged in some logical sequence for consumption in a course format, with or without credit, probably will not help. What is needed is that faculty with the pertinent knowledge and expertise be brought together with the persons who need their assistance. Interpreting the needs accurately and negotiating the format and terms for a productive relationship will require wisdom, tact, and diplomacy. The potential for miscommunication and dissatisfaction from either side is great.

From an external standpoint, first and foremost is the risk of alienating powerful persons and entities in the community who have a stake in the project or issure opposed by the citizen group. It is the same risk confronting an investigative journalist whose reporting of a problem offends friends and allies of the newspaper editor. Knowledge, after all, is not neutral, and citizen group members will apply what they learn from persons in higher education. They will approach government officials and corporate

spokesmen with a further sense of empowerment because of a productive learning relationship with higher education. The consequence could be reduced support for the institution and considerable internal scrutiny regarding the Continuing Education enterprise.

A second external risk is that a citizen group is completely autonomous. Its members may be no more or less inclined than their adversaries to slant and distort information in support of a position. Institutions of higher education can never control how knowledge is used. The subtleties and tentative qualities of a faculty member's position on a particular question may be quickly dispensed with in the effort to be persuasive. The consequence is that higher education may be perceived as the source for a decidedly biased position.

A third external risk is that citizens may develop an expectation that higher education is an ally and an advocate for their cause. This will manifest itself in a lack of patience with the complexities, subtleties, and ambiguities that academicians identify in the problem under consideration. To no one's surprise there will be little tolerance by citizens for tentative, not to mention unsupportive, positions that scholars may develop after studying the problem. The consequence then is that persons who were formerly neutral regarding the institution are now disaffected and hostile despite well-intentioned interventions. An implication here is that a special effort is necessary to make higher education's role very clear. To be involved, to lend assistance does not mean the institution advocates a particular solution or point of view. Rather it means that higher education is committed to facilitating full inquiry and public understanding of the problem. It is an advocate in the sense that citizens start with a deficit

of information and knowledge and stand to benefit from the assistance of educators in accomplishing the difficult task of self and community education.

A fourth, but probably not final, external risk is that the increased visibility the institution acquires through association with a very public problem will inspire other citizen groups to approach the Continuing Education office for assistance. The consequences are that energy and resources are further strained and the criteria for deciding which ones to assist come under increased scrutiny and challenge. Given these very palpable risks the benefits that accrue to higher education from assisting citizen groups need to be at least as significant.

In a very real sense the benefits are the reverse scenarios of the risks. Although citizen groups are an atypical constituency for Continuing Education they also represent opportunities to cultivate relationships and to communicate what a college has to offer. Although faculty members and academic departments may be unresponsive there is also the possibility that they will see in citizen groups opportunities to test their knowledge base and expose campus-based students to new learning situations. Although some persons may be alienated, others may come to recognize higher education as too valuable a resource to take for granted. And so on. Each risk carries with it a potential dividend.

More specifically however, there seem to be at least three distinct benefits to assisting citizen groups. First, there is value, and perhaps status and prestige, in being associated with something that matters, something of consequence. Historically it has been the nature and business of adult education to garner ideas that are relevant to the issues of the human condition and to apply those ideas to the choices that have to be

made. Citizen groups are immersed in problems involving critical choices. The most important kind of education is that which brings knowledge to bear on the resolution of human problems. To be part of the ancient and perennial human quest to improve the quality of life, to answer questions that matter, to help people acquire insights regarding the major issues they confront is no insignificant activity. Through the Continuing Education office institutions of higher education have the opportunity to directly and powerfully relate knowledge to life and its many choices. The "maverick" learners that constitute a citizen group present opportunities to play this vital role.

A second benefit is the institutional and individual renewal that higher education and its faculty members experience in the struggle to make academic disciplines and services relevant to the real problems faced by people. The Continuing Education office can be the "cutting edge" through which institutions of higher education penetrate and become increasingly relevant to communities. It can also be the vehicle for bringing faculty members into contact with individuals and situations that test text-book solutions to real life problems.

Research on the phenomenon of renewal indicates that for individuals it is characterized by intellectual and physical stimulation, increased levels of energy and enthusiasm, and heightened sensitivity. Persons who are renewed are engaged in seeking and generating new ideas. Faculty members are renewed through events and activities that allow them to acquire new sensitivities, new insights, and abilities. They are renewed through events that challenge their current levels of knowledge and ability. Nothing challenges people in academic settings as effectively as people who are eager to learn, and opportunities to make a difference in the lives of

others and to acquire and exchange information and ideas pertaining to their subject areas. Involvement in the struggles and purposes of citizen groups present these opportunities to an extent that few other situations can match.

For institutions of higher education, renewal can be found in a healthy mix of what have been called the autonomous and popular functions. The former include traditional teaching and research, the latter involve provision of useful knowledge and service to every group and institution that wants it. Renewal for institutions is a by-product of attempting to maintain this mix.

Third, there is the very real possibility of "being right," not by advocating a certain position or solution, but rather by being an agent for full disclosure, for more complete information, for testing of conclusions and assumptions that underlie public statements of contending parties. In the case of toxic waste disposal, for example, citizen concerns more often than not prove to be well founded, and more satisfactory solutions are devised. When other legitimate and prestigious societal institutions such as the courts, the government, the insurance industry, and financial institutions have concerns, it can hardly be provocative or revolutionary for higher education to aid in the process of public discussion. The problems and issues facing society are numerous and complex. Through its Continuing Education offices higher education can assume a prominent place in the dialogue over choices to be made.

Table 2 contains questions that may be helpful to administrators of continuing education in beginning the dialogue with citizen group leaders. Answers to these questions may be useful in weighing the risks and benefits inherent in any cooperative relationship. Citizen leaders can use the questions to determine the information they may be asked to provide.

Table 2

Interview Guidelines to Obtain Information about

Citizen Group Activities

Higher education administrators need information about a citizen group to help decide if a linkage between his/her institution and the group is appropriate. As a citizen group member/leader, you need to be prepared to help administrators and your group by providing information about your group. The following questions are suggested as a guide to facilitate dialogue.

PURPOSES

When did the citizen group begin? Why?

Is this purpose related to a larger issue (e.g., one of state or national impact)?

ACTIVITIES

What activities is the group currently involved in (letter writing, fundraising, speaking to groups, protesting, educating, etc.)?

What activities has it been involved with in the past?

What activities are planned for the future?

Does the group give priority to education over agitation and confrontation?

CITIZENS

How many members does the group have? How many are active? Who are they?

Does the citizen group have the endorsement of any other groups in the community?

Has the group received any support from the local citizens who are not involved in the group? Has the group been able to raise money through donations from these citizens?

ENTITIES

Who is allied on the "other side" of the citizen group's issue?

What relationship do these entities have with the educational institution?

Is the court system involved at the present time? Will it be in the future?

Part IV Pursuing the Dialogue with Higher Education

Pursue is the right word. The process is open-ended. There are no guarantees. The reward may not equal the chase. Yet the potential for valuable assistance is real. In addition to help with specific questions or problems, legitimacy and credibility accrue from association with higher education. Since citizen groups have a minimum of history and credibility in a community, even the least bit of association with or cooperation from a college can be helpful. There are some important considerations to keep in mind about linkage with higher education.

1. The administrative unit labeled Continuing Education is the most convenient portal of entry in most institutions. Other titles for the same office may be used. Examples include Special Programs, Educational Outreach, Extended Services, Human Resources Development, Community Education, Community Services, Off-Campus Programs, Lifelong Learning Center, Adult Services, Non-Credit Programs, Continuing Studies, or some combination of the above such as Continuing Education and Community Outreach. It is also possible that in some institutions another unit may be in a better position to lend assistance. For example, Urban Studies Institutes sometimes have more flexibility and more interest in responding to requests from the community. The Cooperative Extension Service of land-grant colleges has a long history of assisting community groups in such areas as public finance, retention and expansion of industry and business, leadership development, group maintenance, and community study committees. However, the responsiveness of county agents to citizen groups' problems will vary considerably depending upon their interest and expertise.

2. Not every institution will be receptive to a citizen group's overtures. Lack of response or inability to respond from one college should not prohibit approaching another. Sometimes the solution may be to find another person within the same institution who will listen. Be sure to make an appointment in advance. Do not expect to get help over the phone. Appear in person.

3. It may not be immediately apparent to the first person contacted at the college how the institution might be helpful. The more specific a group can be about the help wanted, the better. The questions in Table 2 provide some

indication of the information an administrator may request. Table 3 contains an inventory of the services a citizen group may need.

4. The burden is on the citizen group leaders to demonstrate that there is a relationship between the group's needs for assistance and the college's or an individual faculty member's interests. Institutions of higher education are divided into departments that specialize in specific areas of knowledge. A citizen group's problem most likely cuts across several of these academic departments. For example, a problem with ground water probably is of interest to faculty in hydrogeology, public health, and perhaps political science. While this complicates explaining the help needed, identifying the different academic concerns embedded in the problem increases the likelihood that more faculty will be interested.

5. Continuing Education is in many cases, an entreprenurial operation. Public institutions do not receive state subsidy for continuing education. It is expected that the Continuing Education office will not only recover expenses but also contribute revenues to offset the institution's operating costs. Not all services have a cost attached, but being in a position to pay for time and materials increases the chances of getting help. However, even more important than ability to pay is how affectively the case is made that a citizen group's needs coincide with the institutions interests. The group's problems present opportunities for faculty to do research, to give students field experience, and to test the fit between theory and practical applications.

6. Finally, to higher education, helping citizens to understand complex problems represents an opportunity to give substance to the institutions public service mission. While public service has given way to survival in these economically severe and politically conservative times, the democratic values that underpin public service ideals still exist within academe. Appealing to those ideals will require skill and persistence. Private institutions often have mission statements which may specify their commitment to solving community problems. A citizen group's needs represent concrete opportunities to fulfill that commitment.

Concerns about Higher Education

A citizen group may have a number of concerns about whether to approach higher education for assistance with its problem. The purpose here is to briefly describe some of these concerns and to argue the point that none of

them is insurmountable or sufficiently important to prevent citizen group leaders from approaching a local institution of higher education for help.

First, there is a fear of higher education in general. Persons who have not attended college may wonder, "What will they think of me? Will I sound ignorant? Will I talk correctly?" No doubt there are academicians who adopt a superior air and are insensitive about whether "outsiders" feel comfortable. In general, however, this is not the case, and it is especially not the case among those in the Continuing Education office. The fact of the matter is that the problems addressed by citizen groups are complex, interdisciplinary, and certainly sufficiently important and profound for colleges to be concerned. There is however the real possibility the institution's first response will be, "This problem is too complicated and too politically sensitive for us to touch." If so there is a line of reasoning to follow which may defuse this anxiety. Citizen group leaders need to make it clear that they are not asking the institution to take sides, to argue a cause, to be an advocate. Rather the emphasis should be on learning, on understanding more fully a situation or problem that is important to the group and many others in the community. Citizen leaders need to explain that their group is undertaking an extensive program in community education and would like help in order to do the best possible job. Move slowly and keep the requests simple and politically neutral.

A second concern citizen leaders may have is that the college is another bureaucracy likely to give them the run around. Indeed, this is possible. The antidotes to this are three: persistence, an approach that is firm but polite, and clarity about the help being sought. Professional staff in the Continuing Education office are accustomed to playing the broker role. They are experts at bringing together the right people and the necessary

resources to address educational problems. They have contacts inside and beyond their institutions that may be useful to a citizen group. While faculty and administrators in academic departments have other pressing business, they are accustomed to overtures from the Continuing Education office for participation in public service activities. There are just so many times a group can be turned down before people get the message, reinforced by polite insistance, that somebody pay attention and address its problem. Preaching to an institution about the moral rectitude of the cause won't help, but stressing education as central to resolving the problem may.

A third fear is that the institution will take over and want to assume control for the group's decisions. It is well for citizens to regard administrators and faculty in higher education in the same way as any other category of experts, such as attorneys. They have informed opinions, they have expert advice to offer. The group, however, retains the final authority for deciding how to act on their advice. In the final analysis, the group and no one else bear the consequences for how it uses the help it receives and for the tactics chosen to resolve the problem.

Finally, citizen group leaders may fear that after experts in higher education study the problem they may reach conclusions that support the opposition. It should be remembered that much of the assistance a group seeks will have nothing to do with taking sides. Help with internal group maintenance and with the community education process is essentially politically neutral and does not imply taking sides. Also, when a scholar or scientist is asked to give an opinion on a complex technical problem, such assessments are seldom clear-cut and uniformly one-sided. The same facts can be interpreted in a multitude of ways. The scientist's testimony can serve to highlight and inform the community and decision makers that

there is another side to be considered. In higher education, objectivity and neutrality are considered sacred in the quest for knowledge and understanding. Distorting the facts or withholding or suppressing the truth violate the trust society places in institutions of higher learning. In principle,the scientist is free of bias and lets the data speak for themselves.

In reality, however, there is no such thing as science in the abstract or academicians without values and biases. In truth, researchers make judgments and reach conclusions that are as value-ladden as the next person's. There are no facts existing out there some place which scholars consider dispassionately in order to then arrive at the truth. Rather, the questions or problems a scholar chooses to examine, the facts selected to formulate an argument, the methods used to investigate a problem are choices governed implicitly, if not overtly, by that persons values. In the case of complex questions faced by citizen groups there are always multiple points of view and multiple consequences flowing from alternative decisions.

So while it is inappropriate to request that a faculty member discredit or refute a report or testify on behalf of a citizen group, it is legitimate to seek out experts who are at least open to exploring the group's problems. The risk is that the scholar or scientist will not see things or present conclusions as firmly and unqualifiedly as the group would prefer.

Developing Strategy for Approaching Higher Education

Timing is important. As described above in this manual there is an evolution or series of stages in the life of a citizen group. The distinct activities associated with Arousal, Protest, Organization and Self-Education, Community Education, and Resolution are listed in Table 1.

It would appear that citizen groups have minimal need for assistance from higher education during the stages of Arousal and Protest. The group has been scurrying to find out the facts regarding the extent of a specific problem. Individual members have been communicating with one another and relevant public officials. Emotions are high and rumors abound. For higher education this is not a time for intervention. It is a time for reconnaisance and recognition of developments in the community.

It is also true that whereas group members' behavior in these first two stages has been intense and passionate, higher education's posture is characteristically methodical, deliberate, and cautious. This pragmatic posture tends to characterize its reaction to events in the world around it. In summary, there is a low congruence in the early stages of a citizen group's activity between the group's needs and higher education's willingness and ability to respond to those needs. Congruence increases as a group addresses the tasks of Organization and Self-Education and Education of the Community.

In addition to timing there is the matter of accurately assessing the services needed. It may be helpful to categorize these needs according to the services described above in Part III, "Assistance from Higher Education." A checklist to guide groups in their self-inventory of services needed is provided in Table 3. It is well to keep in mind that major differences exist from one campus to another. What may be simple to obtain at one may prove to be impossible at another. Finally, with regard to timing it is well to note that higher education has its own calendar. Some times of the year are busier than others. It is best to arrange for an appointment when the administrator is not preoccupied with pressing deadlines and responsibilities that have to be fulfilled.

Technical assistance. This form of assistance may be the most important. A group may have members who are competent to insure internal group maintenance and to design and effectively carry out programs of education for the community, but may still lack persons who have the expertise to evaluate a technical report, or understand and interpret scientific information, or conduct a thorough and scholarly analysis of a problem, or to prepare a readable yet accurate digest of relevant technical documents for public consumption. Furthermore, even for a group fortunate to have members with such expertise, there is still the problem of perceived bias.

Professors from the relevant scientific disciplines are presumed to have not only competence and objectivity, but also credibility with the public and government agencies. While citizen group leaders may not know the specialities of the faculty members in various departments, the continuing education administrator usually does or knows how to find this information. Requests for help that are funneled through the Continuing Education office have a better chance to be heard than phone calls from strangers.

From an expert a citizen group seeks objectivity, reasoned opinions based on knowledge, competence to present results of analysis in terms that are understandable to lay persons, and credibility based on a well-earned reputation. From a citizen group the faculty expert requests patience with the process of scientific inquiry and the limits of any one discipline; respect for the findings of scientific inquiry and appreciation for the complexity of most problems; an opportunity to involve students in real-life problems; and probably an honorarium or stipend mutually agreed upon prior to this activity. Faculty members have many demands on their time. Citizen group leaders need to appreciate the constraints under which faculty work.

In return for the assistance given, a faculty member may request that someone from the group appear before his or her class to discuss the problem the group is facing. If a professor who has served a group in a consultant role also becomes a "convert" to its cause, this is a bonus. The citizen group needs to recognize, however, that most institutions of higher education are usually offically neutral, leaving scholars free to consider a problem or question on its own merits without implying that the institution advocates specific positions.

Internal Group Maintenance. A citizen group must meet regularly, organize to accomplish the complex task it has set for itself, coordinate myriad activities performed by volunteers with varying levels of commitment and competence, reach a high level of trust and communication, and maintain its resolve in the face of stress, differences of opinion from within, and opposition from without. Higher education's incentive for assisting a group with its internal maintenance needs is that a citizen group probably represents a segment of the population with whom it may have had little contact and this is a chance for the institution to extend itself and to show that the campus is flexible and hospitable.

Over time, citizen groups find that morale suffers, tension increases, members find themselves on an emotional roller coaster, and strife within families and neighborhoods is an unexpected and disturbing consequence of pursuing the objective. Colleges usually have faculty knowledgeable and competent in the areas of stress and conflict management as well as counseling. While the focus of their study and practice may have been on business or on the problems and needs of student life, the same skills and

knowledge can be useful for a citizen group. A few sessions led by a campus expert could yield significant dividends. For any service it is adviseable to ask if there is a fee involved.

Education of the Community. Every citizen group is simultaneously active on many fronts, including writing letters, collecting petitions, raising money and developing and presenting programs of education for the community on the problem in question. Planning educational programs that will inform and persuade friends and neighbors is no simple task. It involves several elements: locating and securing the participation of experts; producing slides, charts, and flyers; using audio-visual equipment; involving participants constructively in the learning process; deciding on the amount of information to present and the sequence; publicizing these events; and obtaining suitable facilities. These educational programs are important and prominent in a group's efforts to persuade the public. Planning educational programs is what people in charge of continuing education do best. They have a wealth of knowledge about the community and its resources, acquired through years of arranging for facilities and subject matter specialists. There is one major difference, however. A citizen group is probably not interested in having a course planned and presented by the college. The format it is likely to follow is a short program of one to two hours in the evening, perhaps repeated several times in different locations. It should be lively, with lots of visual stimulation, variety in the format, and audience participation. Making all of this quite clear to someone who plans programs in a college setting is important if the assistance received is to be useful.

It is difficult to assign a value to consultation about these matters. Be prepared to offer to pay for this advice and professional assistance.

Unless a group has these skills, it will be money well spent. A modest investment of a group's resources will increase the likelihood that the meetings will be conducted professionally and effectively. The fee will be higher when the college produces visual aids or materials for distribution to participants.

The incentive for higher education is to be a catalyst in the community for discussion and study of problems and questions having widespread consequences for the community. In this respect, higher education is not claiming to have all the answers nor imposing specific solutions. Rather it is an advocate for complete and full disclosure of information and values relevant to the issues at hand. A more important contribution to community life can hardly be imagined.

Finally, Resolution stage of the citizen group experience presents an irony and a reversal of the roles that may have been followed to this point. Initially higher education was cautious, distant, and perhaps oblivious to the emotion and concern that energized the formation of a citizen group and its opposition to threatening developments. Through initiative and persistence on the part of citizen group leaders higher education can experience new ways to be involved in community problems and experiment with forums for doing so. By the time some resolution of the problem has been reached citizen group members are perhaps relieved or frustrated, but most of all tired. Except for a core of persons who may broaden their interests and activities to work on other community issues, most seek relief from the emotional intensity of the experience and resume life as usual. The college's Continuing Education office, however, may well see the importance of enhancing community awareness of public policy questions with courses and seminars addressing these themes. Citizen group

members are well advised to support this effort in order to secure the continued involvement of higher education in community problems. Finally, it is appropriate and desirable for citizen group leaders and members to write the president of a college or university expressing appreciation for the assistance provided by persons in that institution.

Table 3

Inventory of Services Needed From Higher Education

1. Briefly describe your group's situation

2. On the list that follows, place a checkmark in the space next to those activities your group is currently involved with or may be in the future.

Technical Area

_____ locating, analyzing, and/or interpreting technical information
_____ doing original research
_____ testifying before various boards and committees
_____ seeking legal counsel
_____ trying to understand the political process
_____ monitoring the meetings of government agencies

Internal Group Maintenance

_____ forming an organization
_____ keeping records
_____ budgeting
_____ organizing volunteers
_____ developing long-range plans
_____ handling personal and family stress
_____ handling conflict within the group

Education of the Community

_____ planning and implementing educational programs
_____ marketing educational programs
_____ preparing audio-visual and print materials
_____ public speaking
_____ letter writing
_____ preparing/distributing newsletter
_____ summarizing technical information in written form for distribution to the community
_____ understanding the workings of government agencies
_____ fundraising

3. Review those areas you have checkmarked and circle the checkmarks for those areas in which you need help.

4. List some specific questions in these areas and specific tasks that you plan to discuss with the continuing education administrator. Remember, the more specific you are, the easier it will be for the administrator to point you in the right direction or provide assistance himself/herself.

5. Remember, some services may be free while some may have a cost associated with them.

APPENDIX

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